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DEPARTMENT FOR OES/PCI;OES/ENV and AF/S

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA'S VIEWS ON UN CLIMATE CHANGE TALKS IN POLAND

REF: STATE 132715

¶1. Summary. EST officer and EST Assistant met with South Africa Climate Change officials on December 18, 2008. Atmospherics were cordial. The South Africans expressed minimal satisfaction with the Poznan talks, noting that progress towards long-term resolutions would have to be reached by June/July 2009 for adoption in Copenhagen. All felt there was a "leadership gap" and hoped the U.S. would step into that role. EST Officer provided the group with material regarding U.S. Climate Change activities and bio information on the potential new members of the U.S. Cabinet. End Summary.

¶2. EST officer and EST Assistant met on December 18, 2008 with South Africa Climate Change officials, including Chief Director: Planning and Coordination Judy Beaumont; Senior Policy Advisor: International Environment and Climate Change Deborah Ramalope; Senior Policy Advisor: Africa and bilateral Engagements Stuart Mangold; Policy Analyst: Africa and Bilateral relations Efa Methi and Chief Director: International Governance and Relations Zaheer Fakir. EST Officer had asked for the meeting to discuss the South African government views leading up to Poznan, but the South Africans were unwilling to meet prior to the conference.

¶3. Beaumont provided a summary of the South Africa position and reactions to the Poznan Conference. She felt the developing countries "did not get much" except for approval of adaptation funds. However, Beaumont said the conference was "useful" because it "cleared the way for serious negotiations." The March intersessional will be critical in her view as it will indicate whether there is possible divergence or convergence in views and whether there will be movement by developed countries.

¶4. Beaumont and Fakir agreed that the Poznan conference was forced to operate in a political vacuum since both the EU and the U.S. were changing political regimes. They pointed out that South Africa was changing political leaders, but they felt the positions on these issues would likely remain consistent.

¶5. Fakir noted that they had met with Senator John Kerry as well as DOS officials in Poznan. Fakir stated that South Africa understood the Administration faces political constraints in trying to convince Congress to adopt climate change legislation. He was encouraged by statements from Senator Kerry that it might be possible to sign an agreement without having to enact implementing legislation immediately. Fakir said that delegates would have to work towards finding ways to "package" climate change to make it attractive to Congress.

¶5. Beaumont said that South Africa wants the U.S. to move from its position of not accepting "historical responsibility." She said South Africa cannot accept a viewpoint that only wants to "work forward." She said that goals requiring developing countries to cut emissions from 20-80 percent by 2020 puts those countries in "difficult positions". Any such goals would have to be in the lower levels to be acceptable. Long term goals must be conditioned on achievement of midterm goals.

¶6. Fakir said there was a world leadership gap, which he described as the "penguin effect." He said, "The nations are like penguins all poised together on the shoreline with no one willing to make the first dive into the water; the EU is waiting for the U.S., the U.S. is waiting for China." Fakir said he would like the U.S. to take

firm leadership and make commitments. He said there is no other nation that can play that role.

¶7. Beaumont felt the Rio+20 concept was an "interesting" proposal. South Africa has been in contact with Brazil regarding the QSouth Africa has been in contact with Brazil regarding the conference, which has been agreed to in principle. The venue remains uncertain. The conference will provide a "useful opportunity" to review commitments made since Rio and WSSD.

¶8. Comment. South African working level climate change officials are pragmatic and realistic. While they remain adamant that the U.S. cannot ignore so-called "historical responsibility," they also understand political realities in the U.S. and appear willing to work within their parameters to reach a climate change agreement that would be acceptable to the U.S.

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